

The greatest trick Bond ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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Domark weren't the only publishers to take a ready-made game and repackage it as an official, hopefully more lucrative, licensed James Bond title. In 1990 Interplay adopted Delphine's 'Operation Stealth' point and click adventure for the Amiga, Atari ST and DOS, performed a quick find and replace exercise on certain keywords in the script, and re-published it as 'James Bond: The Stealth Affair'. *Only* however in the US where the license held jurisdiction. Ironically, in Europe, US Gold took care of the logistics of delivering the French game in its original format.

As a thinly-veiled polymorph of a conglomerate of early Bond escapades, it was hardly an impossible mission to substitute John Glames for James Bond and a neutral gadget guru (aka Charlie) for Q. M is kind of, sort of present in spirit. Possibly

the real one was helping Eric Chahi to develop Another World at the time. Nevertheless, sticking the famous gun barrel intro on the box cover was sufficient to seal the deal, leaving double agent wannabes in no doubt as to who they'd be channelling should they choose to accept the brief. And it *is* fairly brief once you know what you're doing.

Stealth Affair parodies the Bond franchise so closely it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine it was designed from the ground up as an official accompaniment, rather than a vanilla spy potboiler, retro-fitted once the opportunity presented. Yet even without Mr Bond's velvet-smooth charms, the European critics loved it, awarding scores mostly in the 90%+ range. Which goes to show that you don't need to dazzle people with mega-bucks budget licenses to win approval. Whether or not Operation Stealth deserved the enthusiastic praise is debatable.

As with most Bond movies you can summarise the plot in a sentence or two and pad out any gaps with long, drawn-out action sequences. In this case, a top-secret, covert, radar-dodging F-19 super-jet has been nicked from NAS Miramar by the usual suspects and it's James' task to retrieve the aircraft before it can be deployed as part of some despot's deranged, world-conquering scheme.



I'll let the surprisingly comprehensive manual take it from here, complete with strange, SHOUTY capitalisation choices (as also found in-game)...

Current Mission: Recover the STEALTH bomber.

We are sending you to Santa Paragua immediately because agent 006, who has been on a mission there for the last six months, has sent this worrying telex:

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE STEALTH AFFAIR.
STOP. I NEED URGENT HELP. STOP.

Your first task should be to find and assist agent 006. We have learned he has some important documents which reveal the location of the STEALTH. You're on your own after that.

Suspect No. 1 - General Manigua

He was democratically elected by the Paraguayan people three years ago. At that time he was adored by his fellow countrymen. He had thwarted a military junta that threatened to seize power. General Manigua was not known then as General but as President Manigua.

He had never been a military man, but had studied sociology at Harvard. Unfortunately, he has changed a lot since he came to power, but we do not know the reasons why.

A year ago he assumed the title of General and dissolved the People's Assembly, making himself dictator. The country is now in a state of siege. Even his own family no longer recognize the good President Manigua. Freedom of speech has disappeared in Santa Paragua. No-one dare voice any opposition. General Manigua has surrounded himself with a terrifying secret police force which is ruthlessly efficient in its repression of political opponents.

It is under these circumstances that a resistance group called Libertad has been formed. This group struggles in secret against the dictatorship. According to them, Manigua is only the puppet of an international crime syndicate. However, opinions are divided in the group. Other members believe that Manigua rules the country with a rod of iron by himself.

Since General Manigua plunged the country into a dictatorship, we have ceased to support him. We are now supplying Libertad with arms to fight Manigua's secret police, making us Manigua's enemy No. 1, for without our arms supplies, the local resistance would be incapable of fighting.

Suspect No. 2: The KGB

Over the last few years our relations with the Soviet Union have improved considerably. We have jointly signed several treaties in such areas as disarmament and trade. The present leaders of the Soviet Union seem to be looking for dialogue.

However, in the heart of the Supreme Soviet there are extremist elements who advocate the destruction of capitalism and war with the United States.

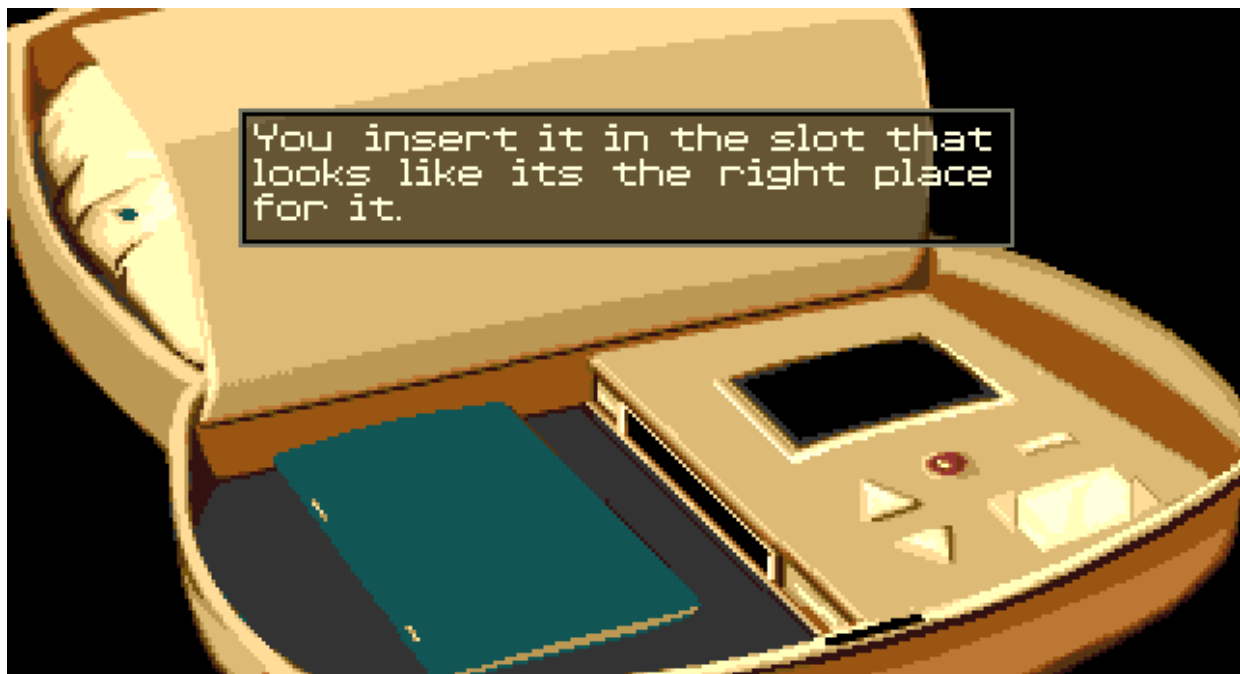
We also know that Soviet scientists have been working for the last two years on an aviation project similar to Stealth. The man in charge of the project, Professor Lukasiewicz, fled the U.S.S.R. and sought asylum in West Germany. Since he left, the project has been frozen. It could be that the Soviets, unsettled by our progress on the Stealth project, have stolen our technological jewel to copy it. Did they act in collaboration with Gen. Manigua? We have no clues.



I take it *we'll* have to dive in and get to the bottom of the fishy conundrum then (anvil time - please pay attention, this is the clever foreshadowing bit). Typical, if you want something doing properly...



Assuming we're playing the Bondified US edition, James begins his reconnaissance assignment at the airport on route to Latin America to meet with 006. It's not a particularly onerous or surprising introduction; our first challenge is to cobble together a fake passport using the electronic gadget found in our trusty briefcase...



...and wave it in the general direction of the security staff to throw them off the scent.



Acceptable passports are any issued by countries with which Santa Paragua is on favourable diplomatic terms. Choose incorrectly and you're thrown in the slammer, commensurate with death in The Stealth Affair. With only one life to gamble it's game over, barely before we've had chance to slip on our

Speedos. Clearly Delphine favoured the Sierra school of adventuring. Had they instead taken their Qs from Lucasarts - who believed firmly in rewarding players for making progress rather than punishing them for their missteps - there would be far fewer opportunities to kick the bucket. Or throw your copy of the game at the wall... or jump on it wearing size 14 Doc Martins... or set it on fire with your custom-made, clandestine flamethrower-pen weapon. Been there, done that, and got the singed eyebrows.



Anyone familiar with the Cinematique control system that made its debut appearance in Delphine's Future Wars should have no trouble adapting to the slightly enhanced implementation found here. Six verb commands are located under a menu activated with the right mouse button, whilst the actions themselves are selected with the left. Evolving Future Wars' control mechanics, objects in the inventory can now be combined, or otherwise manipulated in conjunction with one another. A very welcome, essential improvement.



Stealth Affair's control method mostly differs from the verb menus that typically occupy about a third of the screen in point and click adventures in that it only appears when required, leaving the screen uncluttered and the player firmly immersed in the world of spies, espionage and dodgy one-liners.

That is until Delphine abruptly break the fourth wall to comment on a mistake made in Future Wars that has since been rectified in Stealth Affair (have a word with the newspaper vending machine for further info)...



...to plead with you to buy their other fantastic games, or make self-referential comments for 'comic effect'.

"You take the message out of the bottle. You read: demoralised programmers await your letters of encouragement. The entire team of DELPHINE wishes you an enjoyable time with JAMES BOND."

"You read: MISSION ORDER. PRIORITY: MAX. AGENT: 743. MISSION: Buy all the fantastic games of DELPHINE SOFTWARE."

Snarky inverted commas aside, some of the self-aware references to adventure game tropes are quite witty. Recognition that Bond has 'huge pockets' for instance when assessing the assortment of bulky items in his inventory. Or on occasions where he must repeat interactions with the same people... discombobulation ensues as you'd hope in the real world. How many other adventures from the same era (1990. Did I mention that?) were this clued up with regards to preserving the suspension of disbelief?



Mimicking Roger Moore's tongue-in-cheek twist on Ian Fleming's Bond, Delphine plumped for the comedic approach. Who knows, in French, it may be hilarious? Translated to English, some of the jokes tend to fall flat, or are simply too baffling to even comprehend.

Occasionally it's impossible to discern jokes from intercontinental gaffes; according to the script, poodles are forbidden from entering the park where Bond meets his CIA associate wearing a carnation bought from the florist in town...



...yet the sign depicts a crossed-out sausage dog. If that's deliberate, is it funny? I quite like random nonsense so whatever.



Dishing up well-received humour is, of course, the domain of Adventuresoft and Lucasarts; entering the same race was

always going to be like pushing a square boulder uphill with one arm tied behind their backs. In any case, despite being a bit of a cartoon/comic book caper (check out those Rambo rip-off goons with inflated gorilla arms), Stealth Affair is far from a rapid-fire wisecrackathon, so any blunders are hardly a deal-breaker if everything else floats your boat.



If you examine the books on the shelves in this room you'll discover such classic gems as...

'The hitchhiker's guide to time travel and towels'

'Dynamic dictatorship with power and weapons' by General Manigua

'An anthropomorphic study of power-mad criminals among bees' by O. South

'My life story as a bee' by Otto

One of the 'better' entries in Stealth Affair's comedy repertoire believe it or not...

A pre-recorded confidential briefing delivery system disguised as an ordinary razor issues its orders, then threateningly begins to count down to self-destruction. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... then diddly squat. It was just a joke. Apparently. It's definitely in the right ballpark, I'll give it that. Similarly, later when Bond finds himself bound, gagged and entombed in a cave, his KGB agent captors pass on their regards from Russia. You know, their *love*. Geddit? It's just the title of the movie verbatim. Something more subtle that needed to be deciphered would have been funnier. Oh well.



"No names, comrade Ostrovitch! No names! Let's go!"

Some of the *visual* gags are more effective, especially since nothing is lost in translation.

In Mr Director's CIA headquarters office, the critical significance of the Stealth jet is elucidated via a series of projected slides. Flicking the power switch, an image of a pin-up model appears on the screen, presumably the last

'sensitive document' our new boss was 'analysing' before we walked in. I *think* that's funny, or is it? I'll give it a pass since I made the same joke myself in a video once (hashtag confession... I hate people who do that, must remember to beat myself later... with a moon-rake, maybe).



Observant Bond fans may be wondering why we're reporting to the CIA at all since James takes his orders from MI6 (M serving as the conduit) in-between working as a naval commander. As the story goes, we're on loan to Felix Leiter's pals... from *MI5*. Huh? That's *homeland* security, rather than *international*, so not exactly Bond's remit. You can understand the CIA fudge if the US setting had already been story-boarded in the original game and this was kept to regionalise it for American audiences, but the MI5/6 goof is silly. Maybe that's another joke that doesn't really work, or *does* and it has just gone right over my head? Hmm.

Something else that isn't funny; unfortunately the usual pixel-hunting technique that applies to point and clickers pays dividends. In 1990 we were still entrenched in the era of tiny, barely visible, critical collectable objects that can only be identified by sweeping the entire area with the mouse cursor like a beach-combing metal detector.

We can live with it - it adds to the sense of breakthrough/discovery and goes with the territory to a certain extent. As does the necessity to 'use' or 'operate' everything with everything. Shouldn't these have doubled up as the same function? They *do* elicit some strange responses on occasions where we're required to interact with *people*.

'Using' women is a common theme in Bond movies, although that angle isn't deliberately exploited here, I presume for reasons of taste and decency, and to make the game parent/kiddy friendly. If Delphine *had* decided to go down that route they'd be in danger of transforming Stealth Affair into another Leisure Suit Larry romp... and Sierra already had that market tightly sown up.

To most native English speakers I'd imagine the straight-laced dialogue feels punctilious and sterile. Fine for the cameo parts, appropriate even for the 'suits'. James above all, however, demands a bit of edgy charisma to bring him to life. Is "thanks for the brilliant briefing" really something a suave, sophisticated, professional witty banter-merchant would say? If this was a Roger Moore vehicle you could guarantee he'd make some flippant remark about 'going deep undercover'. We'd cringe reflexively no doubt, but at least we'd know it was authentic cheese.



Lack of spaces between words/excessive use of commas, and clumsy/nonsensical word substitutions aside ('iron' meaning grappling hook? for instance), mostly the script is easy to comprehend with no knowing winks to British pop culture, regional dialect or slang, making it perfectly accessible to anyone who speaks English as a second language. In less positive, polite terms it's supremely bland, undeserving of leg-room on the same pedestal as Monkey Island and Simon the Sorcerer, in spite of the review scores suggesting otherwise...

Amiga Action's verdict, 85%, 90% from Amiga Format, ditto for CU Amiga, 92% courtesy of Zero, and topping the roster, Joystick with a 95% bottom line! (French bias? Supporting homegrown developers?).

Ambient sound effects succeed in setting the mood, yet music is sparse and repetitive, and not especially inspiring or relevant to the Bond franchise. Mostly it consists of a single track played intermittently at varying tempos. Often the audio abruptly drops out entirely, leaving you wondering if this is by design or a bug. Considering the prevalence of graphical corruption evident in the cracked version it's possible this too is caused by the code having been meddled with by third parties. I'd have to compare it with the IPF edition to know for certain.

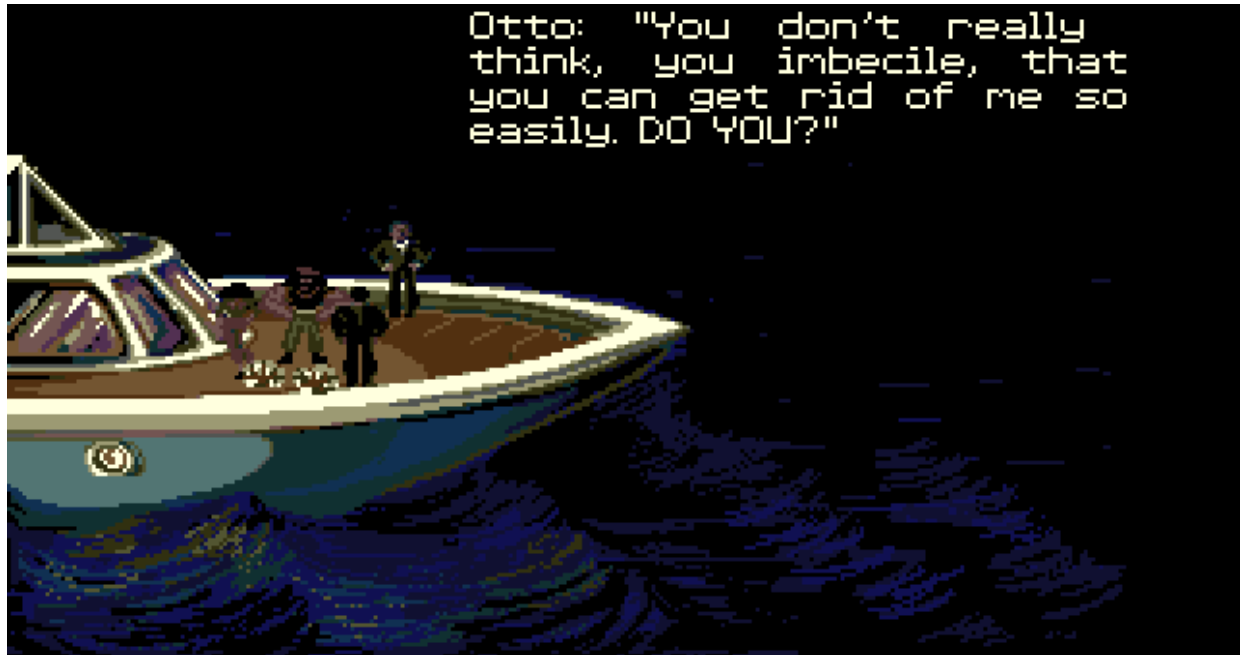
An alternative cracked iteration introduces speech, but before you get *too* excited you should know that this is of the auto-generated variety, courtesy of the Amiga's speech synthesis facility. It's hideously, ear-assaultingly awful so don't even consider trying it for a second. You'll only regret it. I believe Simon the Sorcerer was the first Amiga game to offer a fully voice-acted script, and that was four years away at this point, and required a switch to the CD medium.

Stealth Affair's graphics have to be the highlight, in places almost on par with the likes of their early Lucasarts counterparts. Noteworthy paragons range from tiny, insignificant (attention to) details such as the Mickey Mouse model on Mr Director's two desks that adds a playful touch of frivolity, to the animated vistas, engulfing us in an alien world where casual death is dealt with the flick of an instinctive wrist.



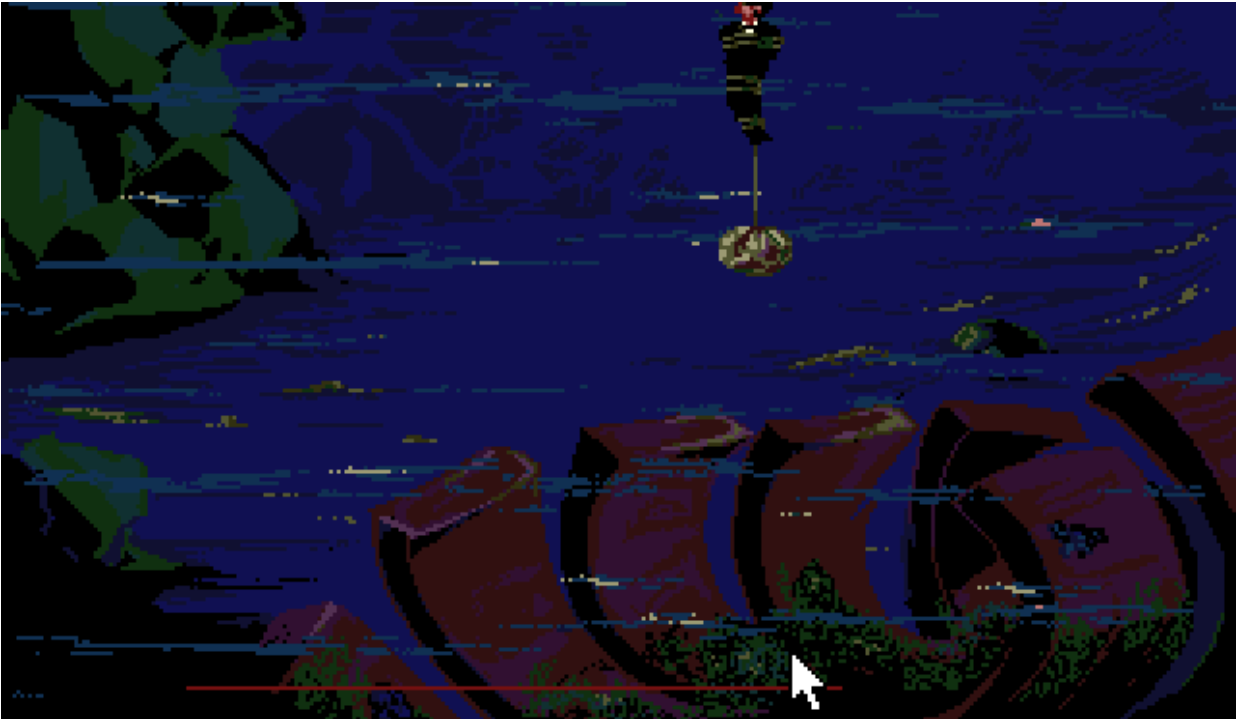
With regards to the latter, I'd single out the hostage-taking incident on Dr Why's cruiser for special attention (yes, that *really* is what the chief villain is called). Voluminous waves undulate caressing the hull's undercarriage, the player

massaged by the rhythm of an organic, lapping soundtrack, while the vessel above heaves and sighs with all the grace and uniformity of a complacent, deeply slumbering chest.



...Right before Bond and Julia (the obligatory love interest) are unceremoniously chucked overboard, their ankles

chained to dead-weights, cementing their mutual fate for the rest of eternity.



Unless they can escape using Bond's deviously cunning bracelet gadget sourced from a stereotyped, suspicious-looking Mexican senior sitting on the beach, hiding under a sombrero.



Somehow I suspect he's an undercover agent planted by the good guys. You may have noticed that he gets about a bit and is always on hand to remind us who made the game, demolishing the final few bricks of that bothersome fourth wall!

"This fellow is just living the dream of all the DELPHINE team:
sleeping... sleeping... sleeping..."



Elsewhere key segments of certain scenes are isolated for illumination, focusing the player's attention and simultaneously engendering a cloistered sense of claustrophobia. Other tableaux are contrastingly cloaked in gloom, leaving only silhouettes visible to establish a sinister atmosphere.

It's conspicuous that three different artists worked on Stealth Affair since the style applied to various backdrops and sprites is so divergent. Characters appearing in the cut-scenes look like cartoon caricatures embracing exaggerated, disproportionate features, while in-game they're more traditional, similar to those found in Fate of Atlantis for example.



All *except* for the dinghy sailor who rescues our stranded, water-treading duo from the ocean...



...and the inflato-armed muscle-men guards. In each case, these appear to be shrunk interpretations of the kind of caricatures seen in the interstitial cut-scenes. I'm not convinced it all gels together particularly well.

Some scenery is entirely inert, whereas other locations are seemingly 100% animated. Throughout, the quality is

similarly capricious, ranging from sprite-work and 'wallpaper' that would feel right at home in a primitive early Sierra adventure, to pixel art worthy of inclusion in the aesthetically striking *Beneath a Steel Sky*. At times the juxtaposition can seem somewhat disjointed. As such, Delphine may have been better advised to adopt one style/artist and deploy them across the board. And also get Eric Chahi onboard. I think I may have mentioned that before. ;) That's *not* to say plenty of other talented people weren't involved...

Information			
Year of the first release	1990	License	Commercial
Number of disks (or CD)	3	Publisher	Interplay - USA
Number max of players	1	Budget publisher	
Simultaneous max players	1	Developer	Delphine
Language	English	Artists	Coder : Jesús Martínez
Language in manual			Coder : Paul Cuisset
Hardware	ECS OCS		Coder : Philippe Chastel
Amiga original game	unknown		Graphician : Daniel Hochard (Imagex)
Have cheatcode	no		Graphician : Emmanuel Le Coz
Have SPS release	yes		Graphician : Michèle Bacqué
WHD install	yes		Musician : Jean Baudlot
HD install	yes		Musician : Marc Minier
Genre Category Adventure Subcategory Adventure - Point and Click Dimension 2D Origin Film Theme Government - Espionage Viewpoint Sideways		WHD information	Author JOTD Updated 2003-07-15 23:01:02
		HD notes	Copy the contents of all disks to your HD.
		Conversion hardware	PC (DOS)
		Conversion notes	
		Classic compilation	
		Relationship	
Page views: 4826 - Last update: 8th April 2017			
Notes: US release of OPERATION STEALTH.			
Coded by RCK of abime.net - Content © 1998-2019 HOL TEAM - Online amiga database © 2002-2019 HOL TEAM - Gen. in 0.05s			

Delivered on just three disks, *Stealth Affair* is no Monkey Island-esque epic saga. There are a fair chunk of puzzles to solve, though given the high-octane source material they feel especially mundane prior to the concluding mega-villain stand-off. To give Delphine their due, the lead up to the finale and its resolution is superb. Breaching Dr Why's defences requires James to acquire the impression of a henchman's thumbprint so as to gain access to a secure area. That's

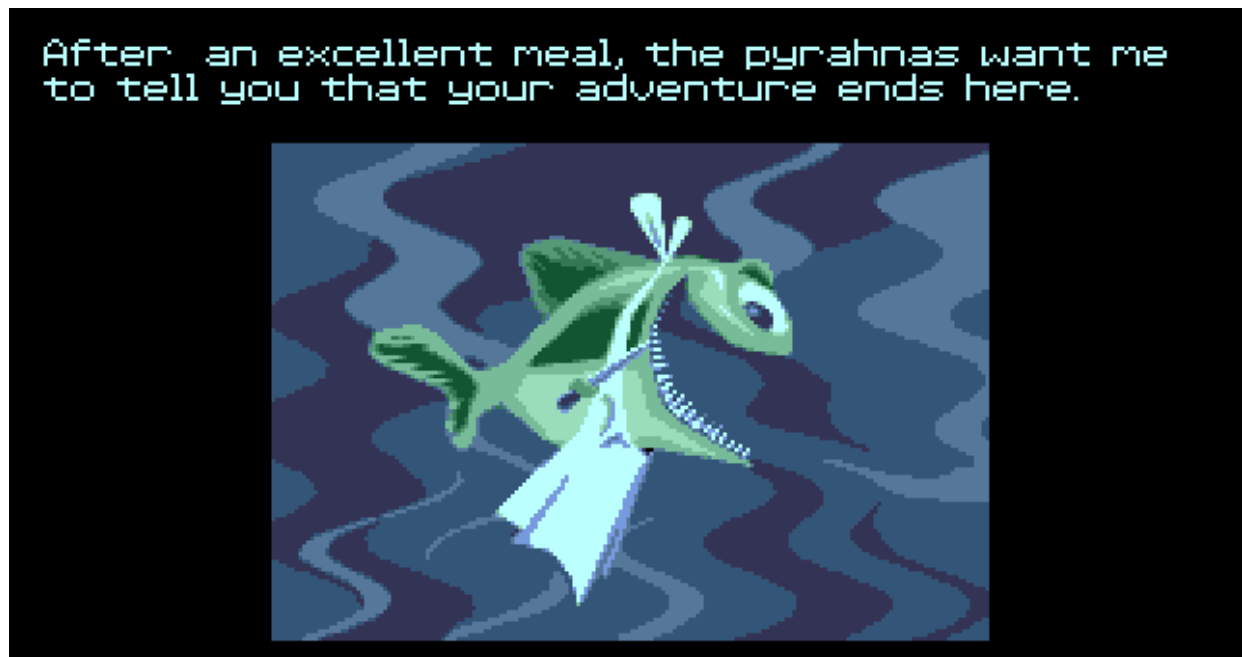
appropriately Bondian. As is being dangled over a piranha tank in a cage with limited time and resources to escape, much like in the movie, Live and Let Die. Obviously he *does*, with the assistance of more super-sleuth gadgetry.



"A tiny climbing iron jumps out of the watch and plants itself in the wall." - a what now?

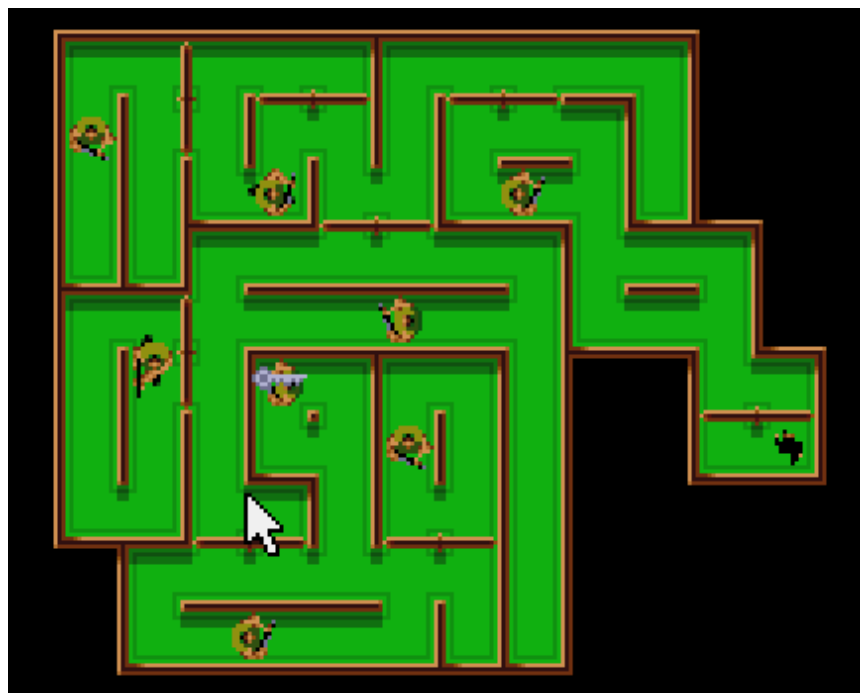


It's even worth dying to see the cute, cartoony piranha drawing.

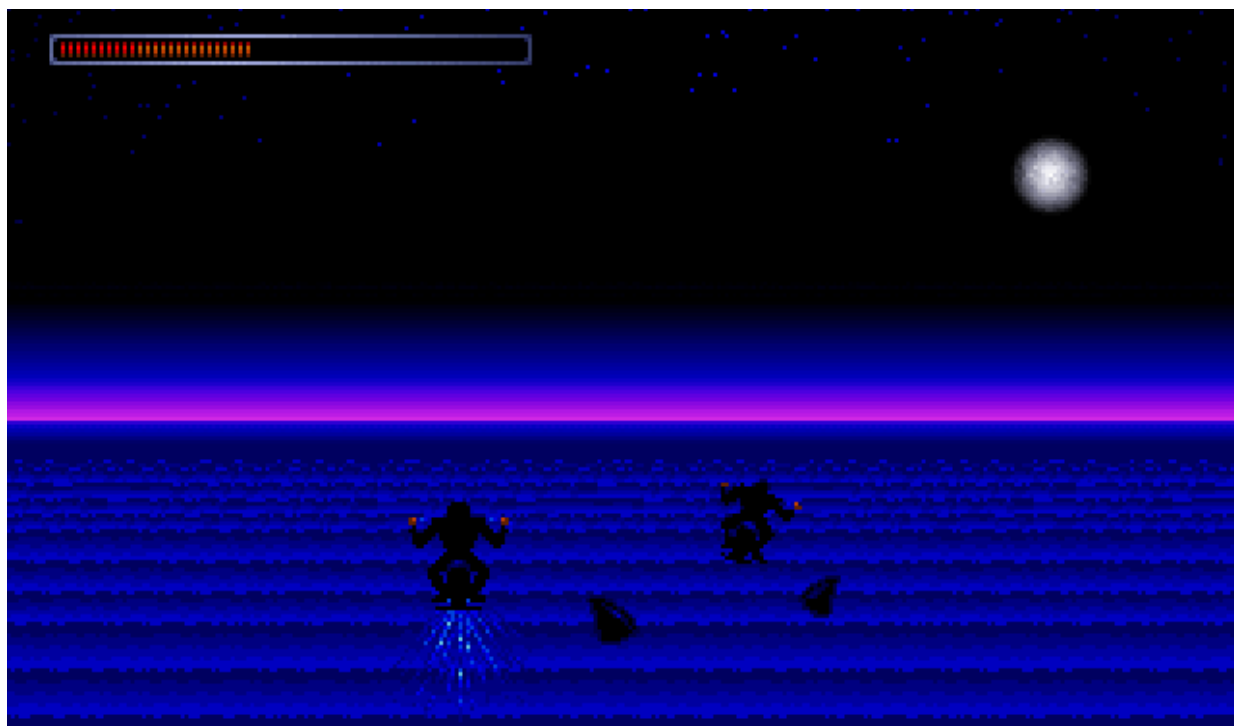


Adding to the drudgery prior to this, interspersed between the puzzle-solving elements are a medley of action mini-

games. There's a basic overhead view 'escape the maze' interlude...



...one involving the traversal of shark-infested water riding a jet-ski, as in The Spy Who Loved Me...



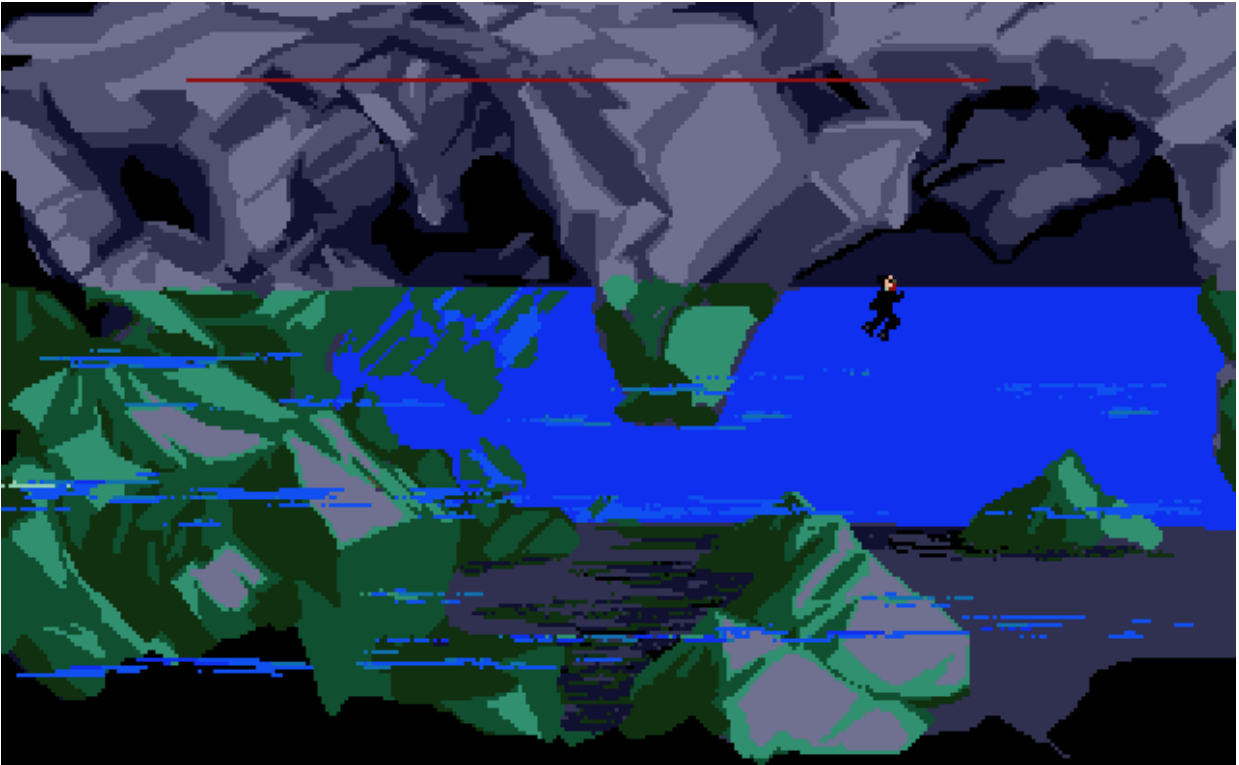
...and another top-down view diversion starring giant rats that must be evaded. I don't remember their existence ever being explained. Are they overgrown mutants?



Finally, there's an undersea swimming section... a race to dry land balancing oxygen replenishment via air pocket caves against the haste of swerving deadly sea life in a drive to reach the exit steps.



Save, drown, reload. Save, drown, reload. You get the gist. Death looms tall around every corner, even when there aren't any.



These action segues add a dash of variety I suppose, much like the scene changes in the main game. Our incessant manhunt leads us underground, overground

...Wombling free, the Wombles of Wimbledon Common are we.

Sorry, word association strikes again. It's true though, we *do* infiltrate Dr Why's underground lair, 300 feet below sea level in fact, inveigling our way into his inner sanctum under the camouflage of a magic show. Genius! It's an automated animated sequence requiring no input from us, but a neat *trick* no less.



Incidentally, Dr Why's burrow-like den is where the Stealth jet is to be found, stowed away in readiness of terrorist-related shenanigans. If we fail to deliver 1000 pounds of plutonium nestled on a premium posh cushion with a shiny silk bow on top Dr Why has threatened to raze all the world's major capitals to the ground, accoutred with the lethal force of his stolen, military-grade fighter plane. Has anyone else spotted the inherent rocky-hard-place problem with fulfilling his demanding ultimatum?



Dr Why's motivation is never clarified, brushed aside by a joke relating to his difficult childhood. Even without really going anywhere, it's not a bad one to be fair, though *could* be interpreted as an easy 'get out of jail free' card. Skirt over the tricky issue and there's no need to wrack your brains thinking of an explanation for his dastardly scheme. I suppose 'he's evil' covers most of the bases, as with many of the movies Delphine are satirising.



Naturally our obligation to save the free world winds down with the destruction of Dr Why's base, craftily located deep beneath a submersible tropical island.

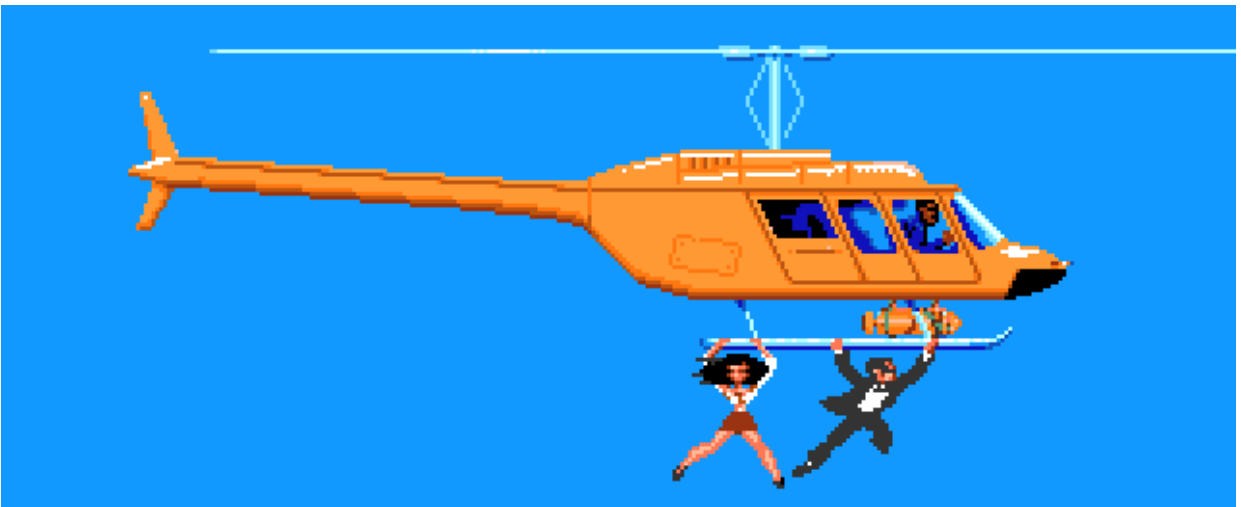


He escapes the theatrically rupturing hideout in a helicopter, *almost* taking Julia hostage.

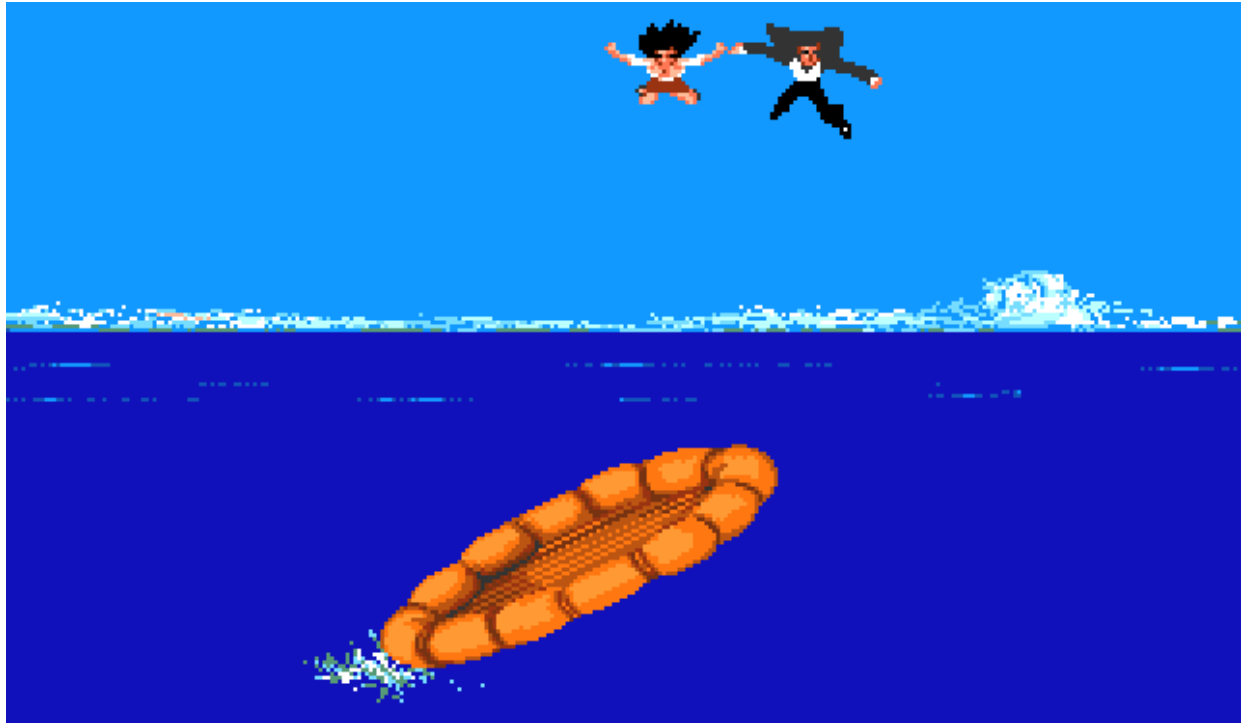




With James in hot pursuit, Dr Why attempts to unleash a bomb to take out the pesky nuisances dangling beneath.



Nonetheless - should we have remembered to sabotage it first with an elastic band - he blows himself up in a spectacular display of pyrotechnics and dismembered limbs. I may have embellished that slightly for dramatic effect actually. It's very nicely done all the same.



Bond and Julia drop down safely into an inflatable life raft, reach terra firma and are commended for their anti-terrorist efforts by the reinstated, true president of the banana republic. As man and womankind obviously sleep easily in their beds, the globe continues to grind on its axis. For now.



For a supposedly high-tech, exhilarating James Bond jaunt we've endured a heck of a lot of tedious groundwork to reach this juncture. As nicely embroidered as the final curtain was, I'm not sure it was worth - for example - scrutinising 15 separate identical drawers in the basement of Dr Why's lair to establish if anything beneficial was to be discovered lurking within. Sadly a microcosm for the bulk of the composition.



With only a single path to completion, it's been a trudging, linear journey, proffering no reason to pay a return visit in the future.

Stealth Affair, or its tabula rasa poor relation, Operation Stealth, is unlikely to be remembered as one of the classic point and click adventures to have emanated from the genre's halcyon days. Were it not for the title's fortuitous alignment with James Bond I suspect it would have eluded the retro-gaming radar as deftly as the CIA's venerated Stealth jet.

